

Message Text

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DEPARTMENT PASS CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: ROK VIEWS OF US SECURITY COMMITMENT

1. EMBASSY REPORTING OF PAST TWO WEEKS HAS PROVIDED CONSIDERABLE DETAIL ON THE SHOCK EFFECT ON KOREA OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO INDOCHINA. ALL OF US HAVE BEEN OUT ON THE HUSTINGS AND I PERSONALLY HAVE MET WITH MOST OF THE TOP LEVELS IN ROK ESTABLISHMENT, IN ACTIVE EFFORT TO COUNTERACT TO EXTENT POSSIBLE ADVERSE IMPACT HERE OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS. WHILE I HAVE NOT SEEN PRESIDENT PARK, I AM CONFIDENT THAT OUR WORDS ARE GETTING THROUGH TO HIM AND I AM RECEIVING A FAIRLY ACCURATE PLAYBACK ON HIS MOOD FROM OTHERS IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH HIM.

2. THE APPROACH WE HAVE TAKEN WITH THE KOREANS IS ESSENTIALLY THREEFOLD:

A. CONFIDENCE-BUILDING -- UTILIZING THE VERY HELPFUL STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT APRIL 10 PLUS OTHER SIMILAR HIGH LEVEL US PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REASSURANCES, WE HAVE STRESSED THE FIRMNESS OF OUR COMMITMENT TO KOREA BASED UPON TREATY, A VERY SUBSTANTIAL US MILITARY PRESENCE, AND AN UNDERLYING US STRATEGIC INTEREST IN DEFENSE OF NORTHEAST ASIA WITH KOREA AS THE CRUCIAL FLANK OF JAPAN.

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B. KOREA-VIETNAM DIFFERENCES -- WE HAVE GONE INTO SOME DETAIL IN POINTING UP THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VIETNAM AND KOREA, WITH RESPECT TO THE INTERNAL SITUATIONS IN BOTH COUNTRIES, THE NATURE OF THE US COMMITMENTS, AND THEIR DIFFERENT STRATEGIC POSITIONS.

C. DOMESTIC POLITICAL POLICIES -- WE HAVE POINTED OUT IMPACT OF ROKG DOMESTIC POLITICAL ACTIONS ON CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR US COMMITMENTS TO KOREA AND URGED THE ROKG TO VIEW TREATY RELATIONSHIP AS TWO-WAY STREET IMPOSING OBLIGATIONS ON ITS PART AND TO RECOGNIZE THE CONTINUED POTENTIAL FOR INFLUENCING US OPINION POSITIVELY.

3. OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT THESE EFFORTS, COMBINED WITH LESS EMOTIONAL SECOND THOUGHTS ON PART OF MANY ROK OFFICIALS, HAVE SOFTENED THE ALMOST PANICKY INITIAL REACTION HERE. IN PARTICULAR, KOREANS ARE NOW FAR LESS PRONE TO DRAW INVIDIOUS PARALLELS BETWEEN KOREA AND VIETNAM AND ARE WRITING OFF VIETNAM WITHOUT TOTALLY LOSING CONFIDENCE IN THEIR OWN SURVIVABILITY. NEVERTHELESS THERE REMAINS A SERIOUS CONFIDENCE-GAP AND MANY ASPECTS OF A "SIEGE MENTALITY", PARTICULARLY IN THE BLUE HOUSE. WITHOUT MAKING ANY BROAD PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS IN FASHION OF MARCOS, KOREAN LEADERSHIP IS MAKING ITS OWN PAINFUL POLICY REASSESSMENT, IN LIGHT OF FEARS KOREA MAY BE NEXT TARGET OF COMMUNISTS AND NEXT TEST OF US RESOLVE.

4. DEPENDING ON LEVEL OF KOREAN GOVERNMENT AND BASIC PREJUDICE OF INDIVIDUALS, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE VARIANCE IN REACTION TO CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS. WHAT FOLLOWS REFLECTS ESSENTIALLY OUR PERCEPTION OF VIEWS HELD BY PRESIDENT AND HIS MORE HARD NOSED MILITARY AND OTHER ADVISORS -- WHO HAVE DOMINANT VOICE IN KOREAN POLICY.

5. KEY ASPECTS OF TOP LEVEL KOREAN ATTITUDES MAY BE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS: A. THERE IS NO PRESENT ALTERNATIVE TO CONTINUED DEPENDENCE ON US. IN SHORT RUN, KOREA HAS NO OTHER POLICY OPTIONS, WITH ANY DEPENDENCE ON JAPAN PARTICULARLY OUT OF QUESTION.

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B. US COMMITMENT TO KOREA IS SUSPECT. WHILE ROKG BOLSTERED BY ADMINISTRATION STATEMENTS, FOCAL POINT OF CONCERN IS CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES AND FEAR THAT IN CONFLICT SITUATION CONGRESS (AND AMERICAN PUBLIC) MAY -- AS IN CASE VIETNAM -- DENY FUNDS AND USE OF US FORCES NEEDED TO DEFEND KOREA AND EVEN FORCE US TROOP WITHDRAWALS BEFORE THEN.

C. KOREA MUST THEREFORE MOVE RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE TO SELF-RELIANCE. OVER LONGER RUN, KOREA'S ONLY ALTERNATIVE IS TO ACHIEVE A DEGREE OF SELF-RELIANCE THAT WILL CUSHION POSSIBLE LOSS OF US SUPPORT BEFORE OR DURING CONFLICT.

D. DESPITE HIGH LEVEL US PRONOUNCEMENTS OF SUPPORT US ADMIN- IS THWARTING SELF-RELIANCE PROGRAM. ROKG IS INCREASINGLY CONVINCED THAT SERIES OF DECISIONS TO DENY IT ACCESS TO HIGHER LEVELS OF MILITARY-ORIENTED TECHNOLOGY AMOUNT TO DELIBERATE US POLICY OF HOLDING IT ON TIGHT LEASH, WILL RESULT IN LEAVING IT IN WEAKENED VIS-A VIS NORTH KOREA SHOULD US FORCES PULL OUT. AMBASSADOR HAHM, RIGHT AFTER MEETING WITH PRESIDENT PARK, POSED THIS ISSUE IN EVEN STARKER TERMS BY ASKING ME WHAT WOULD THE ROK DO IF NORTH KOREA DEVELOPED NUCLEAR CAP- ABILITY SHOULD THE US LEAVE KOREA.

E. IN PRESENT CRISIS AND WITH HEIGHTENED THREAT FROM NORTH, DOMESTIC DISCIPLINE AND CONTROL MUST BE GIVEN HIGHEST PRIORITY. ROKG HAS UTILIZED PRESENT CRISIS AS FURTHER RATIONALE FOR ADOPTING WHAT COMES NATURALLY -- TIGHTER AUTHORITARIAN REGIME INTOLERANT OF OPPOSITION.

F. US FAILS TO UNDERSTAND NEED FOR INTERNAL DISCIPLINE AND IN FACT ENCOURAGES OPPOSITION. THERE IS GNAWING SUSPICION THAT VIEWS OF AMERICAN PRESS AND CONGRESSIONAL CRITICS MAY WELL BE SHARED BY ADMINISTRATION AND THAT SUPPORT IN US FOR OPPOSITION MAY BE AIMED AT UNDERMINING POSITION OF PRESIDENT PARK, PERSONALLY. FURTHERMORE, ROKG QUESTIONS WHETHER IT CAN SATISFY US CRITICS WITHOUT OPENING COUNTRY TO SUCH UNREST AS TO INVITE NORTH KOREAN OPERATIONS IN SOUTH.

G. US DOES NOT APPRECIATE SERIOUSNESS OF NORTH KOREAN THREAT. US UNWILLINGNESS TO SHARE EXAGGERATED FEARS OF ROKG OR TO CONDONE
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TIGHT INTERNAL DISCIPLINE ADD UP TO LACK OF ADEQUATE US SUPPORT FOR ROK DEFENSE.

5. IT IS SELF-EVIDENT THAT SOME OF THE MORE EXTREME CONCERNS ABOUT US ATTITUDES ARE BASED UPON AN EMOTIONAL AND EVEN TO SOME EXTENT IRRATIONAL REACTION TO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS. IN FACT, THE MOST WORRISOME ASPECT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN KOREA IS THE DANGER OF EMOTIONALLY STIMULATED ROK DECISIONS IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF INCREASING SUSPICION AND CONCERN THAT NORTH KOREA MIGHT BE EMBOLDENED TO TEST THE US COMMITMENT AND THE STRENGTH OF ROK INTERNAL SUPPORT BY PROVOCATIVE MEASURES. KOREAN FEARS WILL CONTINUE TO BE FED BY ADVERSE DEVELOPMENTS IN VIETNAM AND KIM IL-SUNG VISIT TO PEKING.

6. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT SOME OF THESE

VIEWS ARE BASED UPON LEGITIMATE CONCERNS ABOUT DIRECTION
OF US POLICY. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLCY WILL BE SENT SEPTTEL.
SNEIDER

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